

Frugivorous pelicans: fish or fig?

At c. 09:00 on 8 February 1987, on the road between the Lake Manyara National Park entrance and Mto-wa-Mbu, northern Tanzania, I noticed several Pink-backed Pelicans *Pelecanus rufescens* in the crown of c. 25–30-m high fig tree *Ficus* sp. I suspected that they were nesting and watched them for several minutes in good light with 7 x 50 binoculars, but there were no signs of nests.

Each bird was deliberately and repeatedly picking individual ripe figs c. 1 cm in diameter, or occasionally a small bunch of figs, and apparently swallowing them. The action was very delicate with the figs in the bill tip; they were then tossed back into the pouch in an action very like that of *Bycanistes* hornbills. Sometimes the birds would walk along branches with no apparent difficulty to another batch of figs.

It seems reasonable to speculate that the habit started with chance encounters with ripe figs when the pelicans were collecting sticks for their nests.

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Received 30 March 1987

Scopus 11 (1): 23, 1987

REVIEW

The birds of Africa. Volume II, edited by Emil K. Urban, C. Hilary Fry and Stuart Keith, 1986. London: Academic Press. Overall size 245 x 318 x 42 mm, pp. xvi + 552, 28 colour and 4 black and white plates, many line drawings and maps. UK price £65.00.

This eagerly-awaited second volume is a great improvement over Volume I and will become an indispensable reference for everyone interested in African birds. The book is strongly bound and generally well printed (in Hong Kong) on good paper. Species accounts have been written by a number of authors (including the Editors) who are listed on the Contents pages. The book is a cross between an old-style work (such as those by Bannerman on various areas) and modern handbooks; thus it uses a somewhat abbreviated English style to save space, but counters this by having extremely wide margins, lots of white space elsewhere on the pages, and largish, but easily readable type. A format similar to *Birds of the western Palearctic* would have been preferable in my view. Any comparison with *BWP* is specious, however, because so much more is known and recorded on the birds of the western Palearctic, hence *BWP*'s much more thorough coverage. But, as with the size, it is a pity that the original plan of covering the whole of Africa—and not just the Afrotropics—has been maintained. However, the mould has been cast, and it would be surely impossible now for the Editors to change either the format or the coverage, even if they wanted to.

The colour plates by Martin Woodcock are first class, and all examples in both the review copy and my own are excellently printed. Plates often have smaller pictures of birds in flight and downy young included alongside the main illustrations. There are four black and white plates, also by Martin Woodcock, showing waders, gulls and terns in flight. Many useful line drawings in the text are by Ian Willis. The maps show much more information than those in the first volume and give an indication of abundance (breeding or non-breeding), migration range and routes, and isolated records; question marks show uncertain records and some species' maps have their own special shading, explained alongside the map.